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N/S Cooperation

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NOTE FOR THE RECORD

MEETING WITH THE IRISH SIDE: NI ASSEMBLY TRANSITION PROGRAMME

A meeting was held with the Irish side of the Secretariat at Maryfield on 24 June to discuss possible North/South seminars for new Assembly Members to include North/South co-operation. The Irish side comprised Mr Donoghue, Mr Dowling, Mr Hackett (all DFA). The British side comprised Mr Cosgrave and Mr Barr (Central Personnel Group, DFP) and Mr Fisher.

SUMMARY

2. A short meeting to explore extending the proposed programme for briefing new Assembly members to include a Southern dimension. Irish side anxious to collaborate subject to agreement on content and timing given political sensitivities, and for this to take place during the last week in August. Outline programme to be provided by the Irish side by the end of this week.

DETAIL

3. The purpose and content of the awareness and familiarisation programme being designed for new Assembly members was set out to the Irish side. It would include present machinery of government arrangements, relationships with the Scottish and Welsh Assemblies and, of particular Maryfield interest, possible scope for North/South co-operation. It was proposed that the briefing sessions (more than one might be necessary) would span two days, one of which would be spent in Dublin. The seminar would need to be carefully designed and not pre-empt views of the First and Deputy First Ministers; it was therefore important that the seminar be essentially factual and informative while at the same time

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innovative and as interesting as possible. The sessions would not all necessarily be undertaken by officials; it would be important to have speakers able to bring a wider (Europe and commercial) perspective.

4. The Irish side considered a joint seminar 'sensible' and favoured a collaborative approach with a programme spanning both Belfast and Dublin, but recognised the need to be sensitive to the political dimension of what was in mind. In the hope that by September ideas would have crystallised on North/South implementation bodies and that the UUP would be more relaxed on this aspect of the Agreement, Mr Donoghue favoured a briefing taking place (either in Dublin Castle or at the Shelbourne Hotel) on or about 25 or 26 August, prior to the likely date of the second meeting of the Assembly. It was agreed that the seminar would include a lunch and reception and the Irish side appeared content to act as hosts of the estimated 50 or so Assembly Members likely to attend. In order then to meet the need to produce material in time for the first meeting of the Assembly, the Irish side undertook to provide an outline of the briefing which might be provided including the subjects to be covered (about a half dozen key areas, including tourism, together with the benefits of North/South co-operation in these areas, and the structure of government in the South). The Irish Side would also advise on the proposed venue and a date by the end of this week.

5. The Irish Side also raised the proposed North America and Brussels briefings under the planned Programme. In discussion it was made clear that dates were uncertain, the NI political parties views ranged from the ambivalent to having serious reservations and that a measured approach was needed, especially to the proposed North American (it might now include Canada) seminar. However, the Brussels seminar proposal had been more warmly received and the parties were generally keen for this to take place.

6. Both sides agreed to keep in touch with one another using Maryfield.

Signed

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